

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 917
By Henry

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Joseph "Black Cat"
Reilly of Nashville.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of Joseph "Black Cat" Reilly; and

WHEREAS, Black Cat Reilly was a recognizable figure on the streets of downtown Nashville who sold newspapers for sixty-five years; and

WHEREAS, he was and will always be a famous personality to both the City of Nashville and to all those involved with Father Ryan High School in Nashville; and

WHEREAS, born March 31, 1922, in Nashville, Joe Reilly was the seventh child of Anthony J. and Bessie Brown Reilly; his siblings, now deceased, were brother Francis J. Reilly, who was ordained a Priest and also served in the military as a Chaplain; sister Anne (Sister Anthony, D.C.), who became a Daughter of Charity and taught school for many years in various areas of the United States and in Puerto Rico; brother Anthony J. Reilly, Jr., who worked for the L & N Railroad for many years as an Engineer and later as a manager; brother Leo Reilly, who also worked for the L & N Railroad; brother William J. Reilly, who worked for many years for the A.L. Korman Company cutting material for uniforms; and brother John Reilly, the youngest in the family, who worked in Atlanta for Lockheed Aircraft Company; and

WHEREAS, his surviving brother is James L. "Chink" Reilly, who is a retired Sergeant for the Metro Police Department; after the death of his parents, Black Cat Reilly continued to live with Chink, who was named his official guardian; and

WHEREAS, Black Cat Reilly struggled with epilepsy from early childhood, attending school only until the first grade; his seizures ultimately prevented him from remaining in school, and unfortunately, alternative schools for exceptional students were not available at that time; and

WHEREAS, at an early age, Black Cat Reilly began to sell newspapers on the streets, and could be found at the intersection of Seventh Avenue and Church Street for many years; he sold papers for the city's afternoon edition, *Nashville Banner*, until it closed, and continued selling *The Tennessean* daily until his health declined; and

WHEREAS, Black Cat Reilly sold newspapers at the Tennessee Legislature for six decades, where he formed lasting relationships with many gracious and congenial staff members, particularly his kind and generous friend, Senator Douglas Henry; Cat counted a number of distinguished Nashvillians among his good friends, including his nephew, Bill Reilly; grandnephew, Rick Reilly; cousin, Paul Barnard; Mike Barnard; the Franceson twins; Farrell Owens; Steve Smith; Reece Smith; Ken Murphy; John "Bubba" Donnelly; Boots Donnelly; John Seigenthaler; Pat Thompson; Jack Craw and his son, Alex; Joseph Coode; and all the coaches at Father Ryan High School; and

WHEREAS, Cat Reilly truly enjoyed his job carrying newspapers to the State Legislature and wanted to continue for as long as possible. He was proud of his work and most grateful to all of the members of the Legislature for their acts of generosity and the many kindnesses shown to him, especially former Nashville Mayor Ben West, who routinely picked Cat up and gave him rides to the newspaper building on Broadway, and former Tennessee Governor Ned McWherter, at whose mansion Black Cat was a dinner guest; and

WHEREAS, former Nashville Sounds owner Larry Schmittou met Black Cat when they both worked for the Vanderbilt Commodores baseball team. Mr. Schmittou was the Commodore's Coach, and Cat was the batboy; Larry Schmittou remembers Cat having an "uncanny ability to win things" at the fair, always bringing back "giant teddy bears" for Coach Schmittou's children; and

WHEREAS, one of Black Cat Reilly's closest and oldest friends was George Steinbrenner, owner of the New York Yankees, Mr. Reilly's favorite baseball team. Mr. Steinbrenner befriended Cat when the Yankees were affiliated with the Nashville Sounds, and when Cat was able to travel, his brother Chink or his good friend Wayne Hammontree took him to the Spring Training Camp in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida; Mr. Steinbrenner gave Black Cat and his guest access to the team's dugout and dressing room, provided lodging in a hotel, and provided them with the best seats for the games; and

WHEREAS, in 2005, after Black Cat mentioned to Mr. Steinbrenner's secretary that he needed a new wristwatch, a new one bearing the Yankees insignia arrived promptly in the mail; Cat refused to let it out of his sight, and kept it on his bed so he could easily locate it and ensure its continued safety; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Reilly frequented the city's athletic events, particularly the baseball games, where he sold souvenirs and discussed the players and their batting averages with singular authority. He also enjoyed football, basketball, and hockey, and often attended every game of the season; he was a fixture at all of the Father Ryan High School games, where he was very popular with the students, helping to "coach" the team and traveling with them to their away games; and

WHEREAS, according to his brother Chink, Black Cat got his nickname fifty years ago, when a man playing pool gave him a dollar and told him, "You're like a black cat – go get yourself a milkshake." Ironically, Black Cat Reilly became known over the years as a good luck charm to everyone who came in contact with him, putting the "Black Cat Hex" on any winning team he did not support; his inexplicable good luck and astonishing ability to win inspired George Steinbrenner to invite him to Florida for the Yankees' pre-season games for several seasons; and

WHEREAS, a lover of music, especially Big Band music, Cat Reilly carried with him the biggest portable stereo unit he could find, along with a sack of CDs. After selling papers to his regular customers, he sat on the front porch at McCabe Golf Course with his "boom box" beside him, listening to the music as he watched golfers tee off on the first hole; as a boy, he prowled the woods around McCabe's twenty-seven holes, finding and washing wayward balls and then selling them to his friends; and

WHEREAS, a few days before his death on February 16, 2006, Black Cat told his brother Chink that he was looking forward to seeing Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig, along with his many other friends who had passed; Cat assured his brother that his soul would be going straight to Heaven, "just like a rocket from Cape Canaveral,"; and

WHEREAS, Chink and his wife Darleen wish to convey their deep gratitude and thanks to all the House and Senate members for the many years of kindness, generosity, helpfulness, and friendship extended to Joe; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting that this General Assembly should pause to remember the bountiful life of this exceptional citizen and human being; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we honor the memory of Joseph "Black Cat" Reilly, reflecting fondly upon his long and inspiring journey here on earth, his extraordinary character, his youthful spirit, and his stalwart commitment to living his unconventional life with courage and conviction.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family and many friends of Joseph "Black Cat" Reilly.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.